McGILL UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

The buildings of McGill University.

Ramsay Traquair.

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McGILL UNIVERSITY PUBLICATIONS
SERIES XIII. (ART AND ARCHITECTURE) NO. 2

THE BUILDINGS
of
McGILL UNIVERSITY

by

RAMSAY TRAQUAIR, M.A. (Hon.) F.R.I.B.A.

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MONTREAL, 1925.

THE BUILDINGS
OF
McGILL UNIVERSITY

By PROF. RAMSAY TRAQUAIR, M.A. (Hon.), F.R.I.B.A.

REPRINTED FROM THE JOURNAL, ROYAL ARCHITECTURAL INSTITUTE OF CANADA,
MARCH, 1925.

THE REDPATH MUSEUM, McGILL UNIVERSITY, MONTREAL, 1880

Hutchison and Steele, Architects.

THE STRATHCONA MEDICAL BUILDING, 1907

Brown and Vallance, Architects.

McGILL UNIVERSITY, MONTREAL, IN 1852, FROM THE MOUNTAIN

The Buildings of McGill University

By PROF. RAMSAY TRAQUAIR, M. A. (HON.) F. R. I. B. A.

IN 1813 the Honourable James McGill died, leaving to the Royal Institution for the Advancement of Learning his Burnside estate of forty-six acres and the sum of £10,000. Attached to the bequest were three important conditions: that a university should be established within ten years, that the buildings should be "upon the said last-mentioned tract or parcel of land" and that one of the colleges in the new university should be called "McGill College."

Montreal was at this time a city of only some twelve to fifteen thousand inhabitants with but small trade or business. The West was not yet opened up and the flood of grain, which has created the present great port, had not commenced to flow. It was a small place and apparently not a very rich one. Yet the desirability of providing an education for its English citizens had been considered for many years and James McGill's bequest was the fulfilment of much previous thought and work.

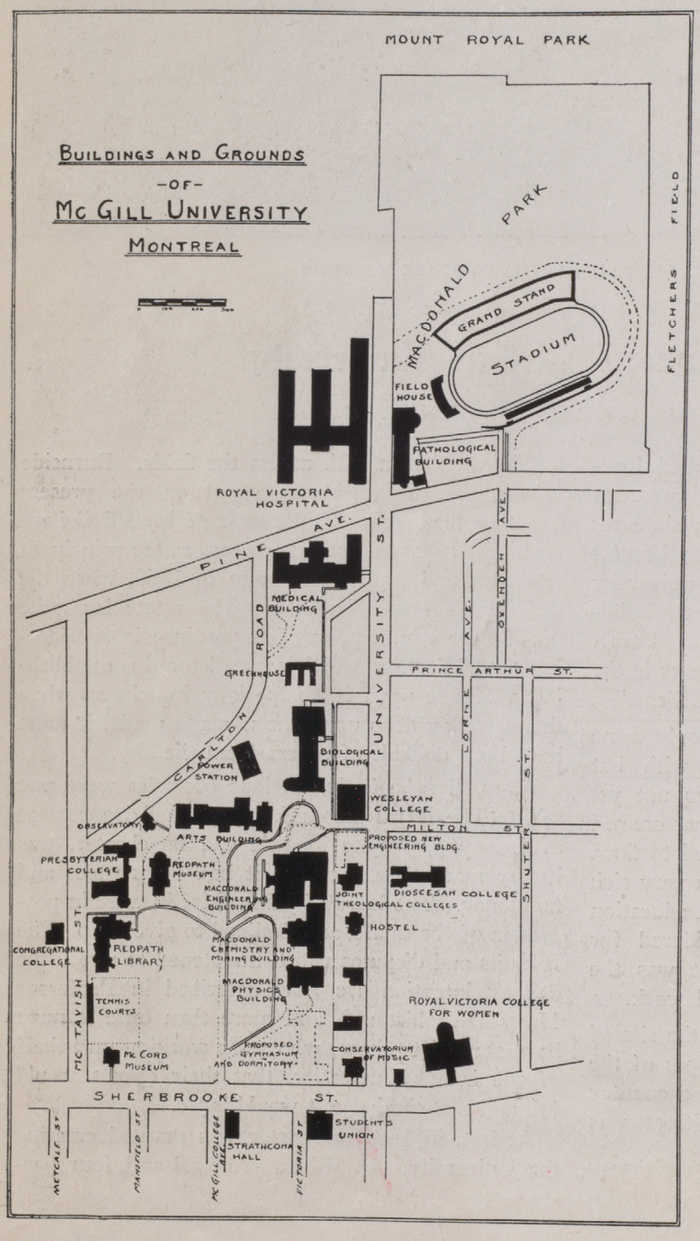
The estate of Burnside extended from the site of the present Arts building on the first slopes of the mountain to Dorchester Street, then only a country road, whilst the present Sherbrooke Street was little more than a path across the fields. Burnside House, McGill's residence, stood on the present street of that name, a little west of McGill College Avenue. It served for many years as the principal's residence and was pulled down in 1860, when the land was sold for building. The estate lay quite outside the city, a point of importance in considering the difficulties which arose later in establishing a college upon it. Especially in winter, when the snow lay deep upon the unmade roads, it must have been difficult of access from the city.

From the beginning serious obstacles were met with. The Royal Institution for the Advancement of Learning, despite its title and its charter, was hardly more than a name; it had no trustees and no money. The heirs of James McGill were in possession of the estate, and declined to give it up. The lawsuits and disputes which threatened to wreck the donor's intention are fully described in Professor Macmillan's history*, and more than once it must have seemed to those, who were working on behalf of the infant University, that their efforts would fail and that the bequest would lapse.

At last, in 1821, a charter was granted creating the University. In 1824 a principal and four pro-

* "McGill and Its Story." Cyrus Macmillan. To which acknowledgement must be made for information in this article.

DIAGRAMMATIC BIRDS-EYE VIEW, SHOWING POSITION OF THE BUILDINGS



1. ROYAL VICTORIA HOSPITAL
2. PATHOLOGICAL BUILDING
3. STRATHCONA MEDICAL BUILDING
4. MOLSON STADIUM
5. FACULTY CLUB
6. GREENHOUSES AND BOTANICAL LABORATORY
7. OLD MEDICAL BUILDING
8. POWER HOUSE
9. BIOLOGICAL BUILDING
10. WESLEYAN COLLEGE
11. WORKMAN BUILDING
12. DIOCESAN COLLEGE
13. EAST WING OF ARTS BUILDING
14. CENTRE BLOCK, ARTS BUILDING
15. MOLSON HALL
16. REDPATH MUSEUM
17. OBSERVATORY
18. PRESBYTERIAN COLLEGE
19. REDPATH LIBRARY
20. ADDITIONAL STACKS TO REDPATH LIBRARY
21. McGILL'S TOMB
22. MACDONALD ENGINEERING BUILDING
23. MACDONALD CHEMISTRY AND MINING BUILDING
24. MACDONALD PHYSICS BUILDING
25. ROYAL VICTORIA COLLEGE
26. CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC
27. THE UNION
28. STRATHCONA HALL
29. HIGH SCHOOL OF MONTREAL
30. RODDICK MEMORIAL GATES
31. McCORD NATIONAL MUSEUM

THE ARTS BUILDING, McGILL UNIVERSITY, MONTREAL
Fowler & Roy, Architects.

THE REDPATH LIBRARY, McGILL UNIVERSITY, MONTREAL, 1891
Taylor & Gordon, Architects.

EXTENSION TO UNIVERSITY LIBRARY, McGILL UNIVERSITY, MONTREAL, 1923

Nobbs and Hyde, Architects.

THE MacDONALD PHYSICS BUILDING, McGILL UNIVERSITY, MONTREAL, 1890
Taylor, Hogle and Davis, Architects

fessors, with no duties, were appointed. On June 24th, 1829, possession was obtained of the estate and McGill University was formally opened in Burnside House.

Even this was but a phantom university. There were no college buildings, no system of general education and no endowment, for the legacy was not paid over until 1837. It was evident that actual teaching should be conducted by the University if full legal rights were to be obtained. Accordingly, immediately after the formal opening of the University, the Montreal Medical Association was incorporated into McGill University as its Faculty of Medicine. This association had been established in 1824 by the staff of the Montreal General Hospital, but had been unable to obtain incorporation or to confer degrees. These privileges it now obtained, its teachers were named as the first professors and in 1833 the first degree of McGill University was conferred upon a medical graduate.

In 1836 the first definite proposals

THE MacDONALD CHEMISTRY BUILDING, McGILL UNIVERSITY, 1896
Taylor, Hogle and Davis, Architects.

THE MacDONALD ENGINEERING BUILDING, McGILL UNIVERSITY, MONTREAL, 1907
Percy E. Nobbs, Architect.

for buildings were put forward. These were to accommodate forty students and two professors at a cost of between £4,000 and £5,000. But the acting principal, Dr. Bethune, had larger ideas and in 1838 submitted proposals for what he considered necessary. These included accommodation for one hundred students, each of whom was to have a bedroom, with a sitting-room shared between two, residence for the principal, the vice-principal and four professors, a college hall for lectures and meetings, a library, a chapel and a stewards' house.

These proposals were rejected as too ambitious by the Royal Institution, who again announced their inability to pay more than some £5,000, but eventually in August, 1838, a competition for architects was announced for the buildings and the layout of the grounds. The accommodation required followed closely Dr. Bethune's proposals, but a note was added that only a portion of the buildings would be built for the present at a cost of £5,000. The residential part was to be added later and accommodation was to be provided for one hundred non-residential students. "The sum of fifty pounds currency will be paid for the plan which shall be accepted by the board as the best plan; and twenty-five pounds for the plan which shall be adjudged as second best." Apparently the plans were to be bought outright at these prices.

Plans were submitted, two of which will be found reproduced in Professor Macmillan's History, but it is evident that there was a hopeless cleavage between the desires of the Principal and the finances at the disposal of the Institute. The plans were all rejected as too expensive and nothing seems to have come of the competition.

Yet the Board considered it urgently necessary that buildings should be erected on the estate and teaching commenced in them. Accordingly in 1840 plans were approved and by 1843 the east wing and centre block of the present Arts building had been finished.* The original plans have not survived, but it seems probable that a west wing and connecting corridors were contemplated from the beginning. But even for the part built the cost largely exceeded the estimates and it was found necessary to offer for sale as building lots that part of the estate lying below Sherbrooke Street and including the old McGill House. This action has often been regretted, yet it is difficult to see what other steps could have been taken at the time to provide the necessary funds.

So, in 1843, the buildings were opened for teaching with twenty students.

Although the competition had been addressed to architects, yet it seems probable that no architect was formally employed upon the first McGill build-

*The Architects were Fowler and Roy.

THE ROYAL VICTORIA COLLEGE, McGILL UNIVERSITY, 1899
Bruce Price, Architect.

ings. It was indeed the common practice of the time for contractors to prepare the designs even for the elaborate dwelling houses which were now springing up in the western suburbs of the city. Their design and detail show clearly the hands of English draughtsmen, trained in the contemporary Greek revival school, but the names of the designers are lost. The McGill buildings are of a refined late Georgian type, with Greek influence, and are probably from the hand of some capable contractors' architect.

The centre building is surmounted by a very graceful octagonal cupola, the oldest landmark of McGill. It is in three storeys, the lowest rusticated, with a centre bay of two pilasters supporting a low pediment. The accent of the last phases of English traditional classic is quite unmistakable. The present wooden porch of four Greek doric columns was added between 1860 and 1875. In 1853 a sum of £75 was voted by the governors for the erection of a porch, but in 1860 it had not yet been built. Photographs of 1876 show it crowned by a low balustrade and balcony of much more pleasing appearance than the present flat pediment.

The east wing is treated with pilasters and a strong roof cornice. It was originally covered by a plain hipped roof, and the present large semi-circular dormer windows date from 1888, when the upper storey was converted into "a large and commodious drawing-room" for the young Faculty of Applied Science.

The two buildings stood unconnected until 1861, when Mr. William Molson built the hall which still bears his name and the connecting corridors "according to the original design", as is expressly stated in the letter of gift.

But before this first donation the University had seventeen stormy and difficult years to pass through.

As has already been mentioned the buildings were still too far from the city for a non-residential college. To add to the tale of misfortune, the city in 1852 began blasting for the reservoir behind the property and large stones fell through the roof of the main building, already in poor repair. So for the time it had to be abandoned; the Principal and the secretary, or one of the professors, lived in the east wing, eking out their salaries by a kitchen garden, and classes were conducted in Burnside Hall,

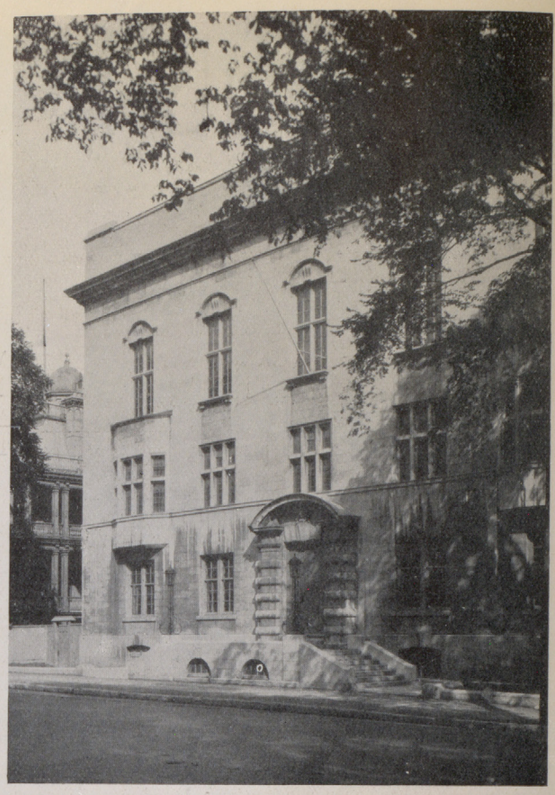
the building now occupied by the Fraser Institute on Dorchester Street. By 1857 the centre block had evidently been repaired, for it was now occupied by the Professor of French, who announces in the Prospectus that he will take undergraduates and High School pupils as boarders at £50 a year, and will supervise their studies, conduct and religious interests.

By 1860, however, the number of students had increased to over one hundred and the classes were at last established in the college buildings; the main avenue was laid out and Principal Dawson's tree planting was well under way. The beauty of McGill campus to-day owes much to the care with which Dr. Dawson selected every tree and arranged its placing.

The first desperate struggle was now over: McGill commenced to grow. In 1861-2 the western wing and the connecting corridors were added, by Mr. William Molson, containing a Convocation Hall and library, with, in the corridors, a museum, chemical classrooms and laboratory. An extra storey was added to these corridors at a later date, probably about 1880, much to the detriment of the building.

In 1863 the college observatory was established, and 1872 the old Medical building was erected to accommodate the Medical Faculty, who now moved from their city quarters in Coté Street to the University grounds. There could be no clearer proof than this that the city was growing nearer to McGill.

OSLER MEMORIAL BUILDING McGILL UNIVERSITY, 1923
Nobbs and Hyde, Architects.

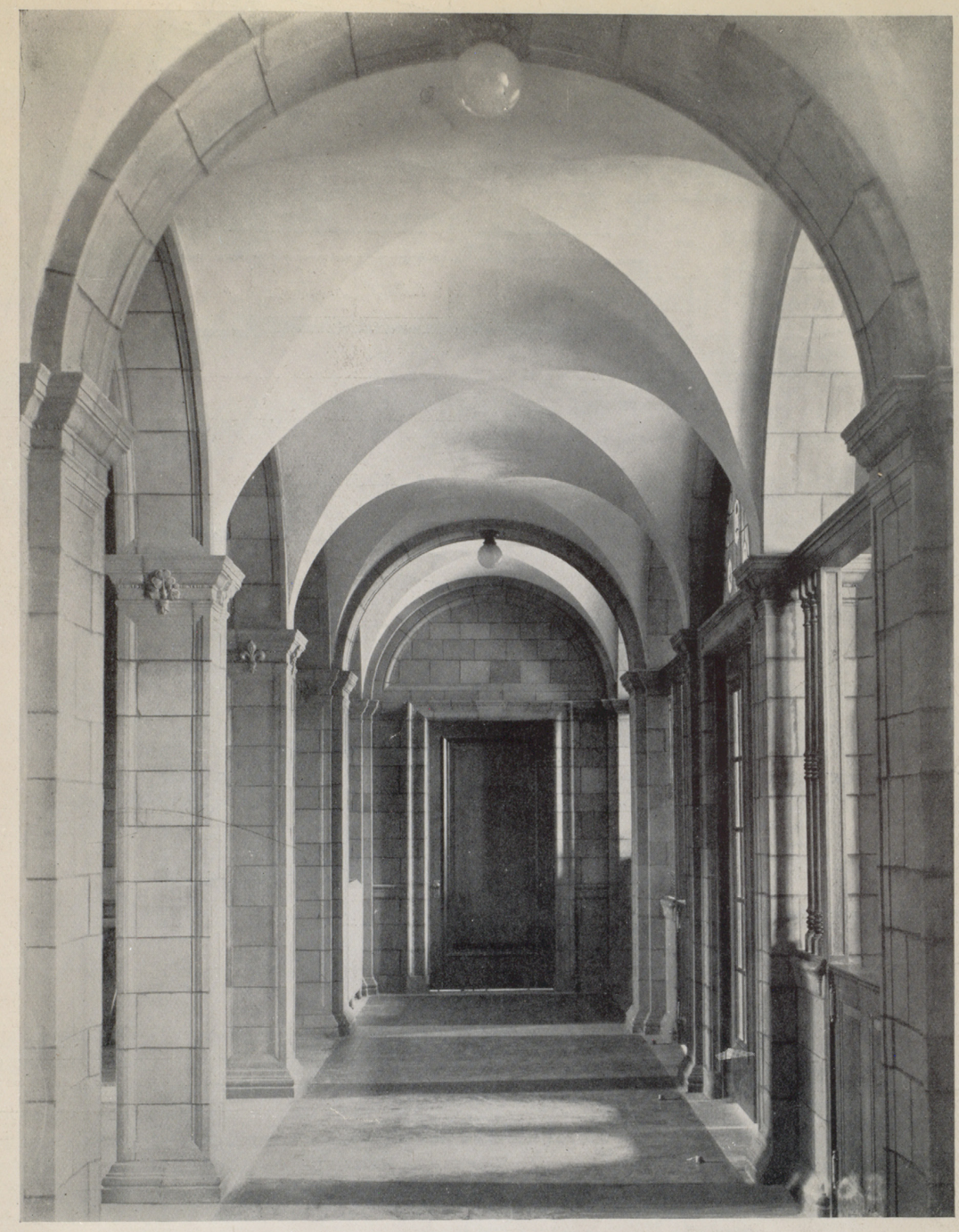


McGILL UNIVERSITY UNION, 1905.
Percy E. Nobbs, Architect.
Hutchinson and Wood, Associate Architects.

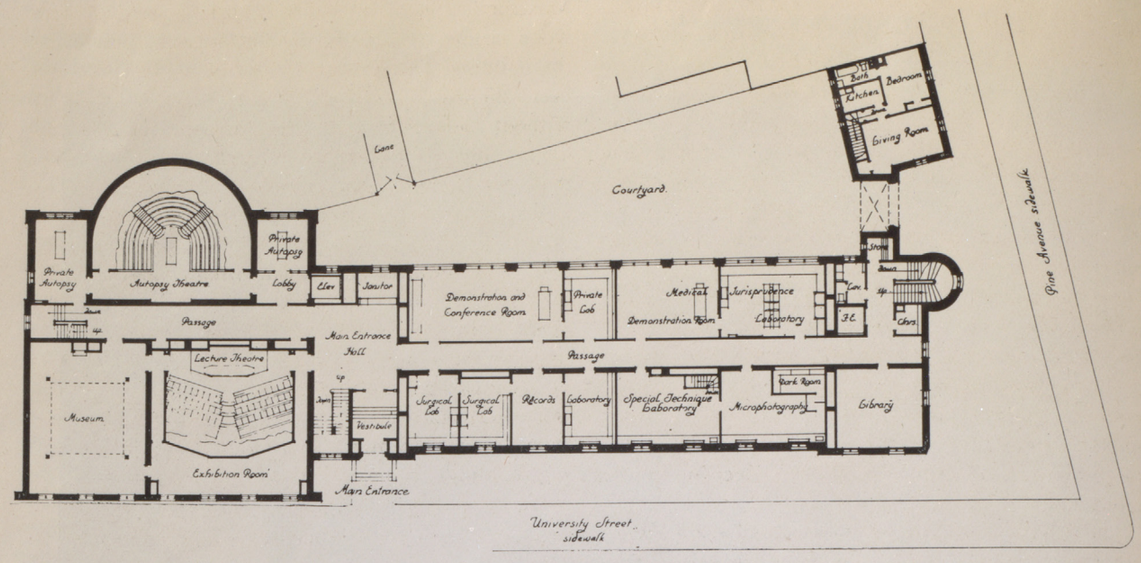
The building was of a simple classic character, harmonizing well with the older buildings. Additions were made to it in 1885, 1894 and 1900, and the front part was burned in 1907. Of the old building only the rear, built in 1894 by Messrs. Taylor and Gordon, now remains as part of the Biological building erected in 1921 from designs by Messrs. Ross and Macdonald. A spirit of over-rigid economy seems to have dogged the progress of these buildings from the first addition.

The steady growth of the University in another direction was shown by the opening of the Peter Redpath Museum in 1880, to hold the natural history and geological collections. It was designed by Messrs. Hutchison and Steel in a somewhat romantic version of Greek Revival and seems to have aroused considerable interest at the time, for it was illustrated in Ferguson's History of Modern Architure. The general mass and proportion are fine, even if the two columns of the front are a little garish and the entablature a little overpowering and out of scale. A plan, now in Ottawa, shows a similar building symmetrically placed on the opposite side of the campus, but this never seems to have been more than a suggestion. The Peter Redpath Museum is the first building whose architects are known to us.

Ten years later, in 1890-91 Mr. Redpath gave the present Library building, of which the archi-



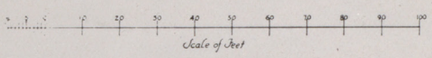
ENTRANCE HALL, McGILL STUDENTS UNION, MONTREAL, 1905
Percy E. Nobbs, Architect.

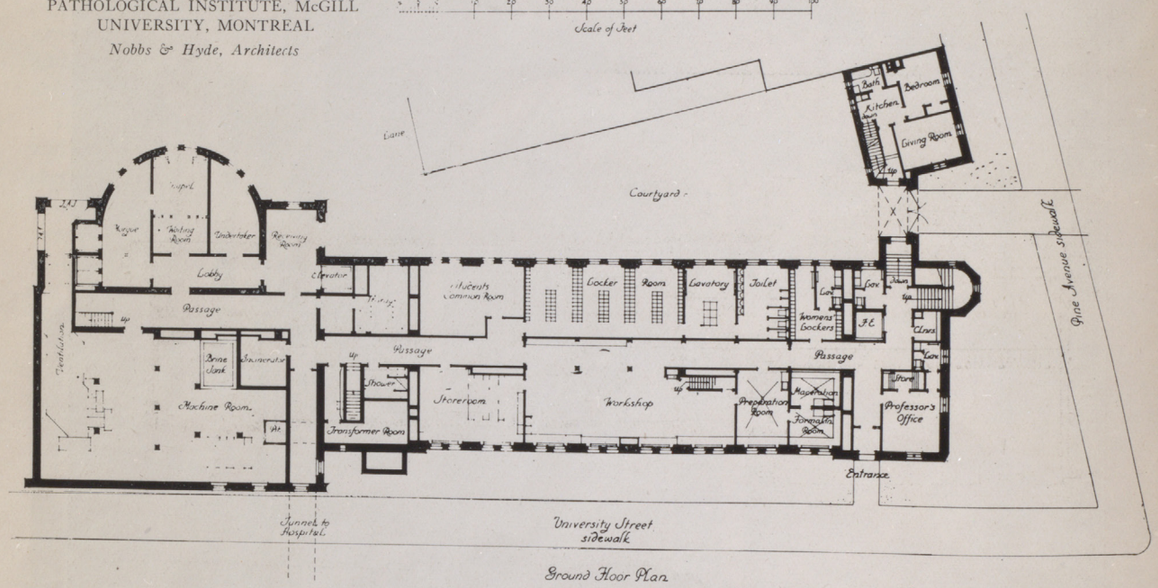


First Floor Plan.

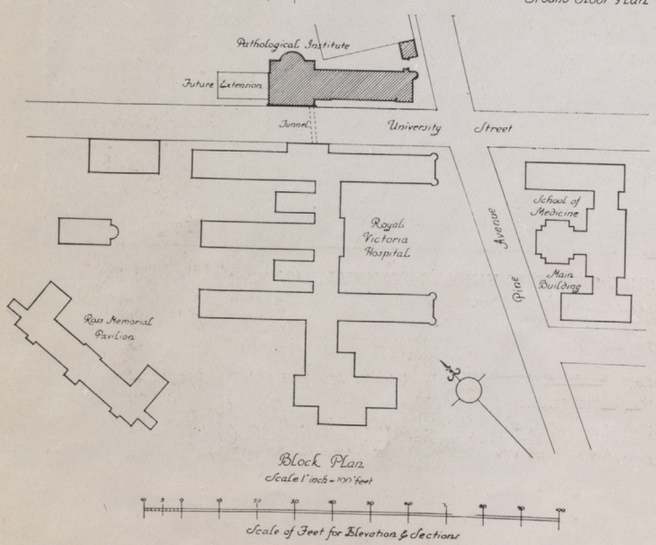
PATHOLOGICAL INSTITUTE, McGILL UNIVERSITY, MONTREAL

Nobbs & Hyde, Architects





Ground Floor Plan.



tects were Messrs. Taylor, Hogle and Davis. This is quite a good example of the "Richardsonian Romanesque", of which the prototype was the well-known Trinity Church at Boston, and of which Mr. Price's C.P.R. offices on Windsor Street are a well-known example. It is a vigorous design of a type which to-day is purely historical, for the effort failed to create a national American style by a reconstruction of Romanesque and Byzantine forms. The stack space of the library has been added to twice since it was originally built. The latest addition, by Messrs. Nobbs and Hyde in 1921, is a successful variation from the original theme.

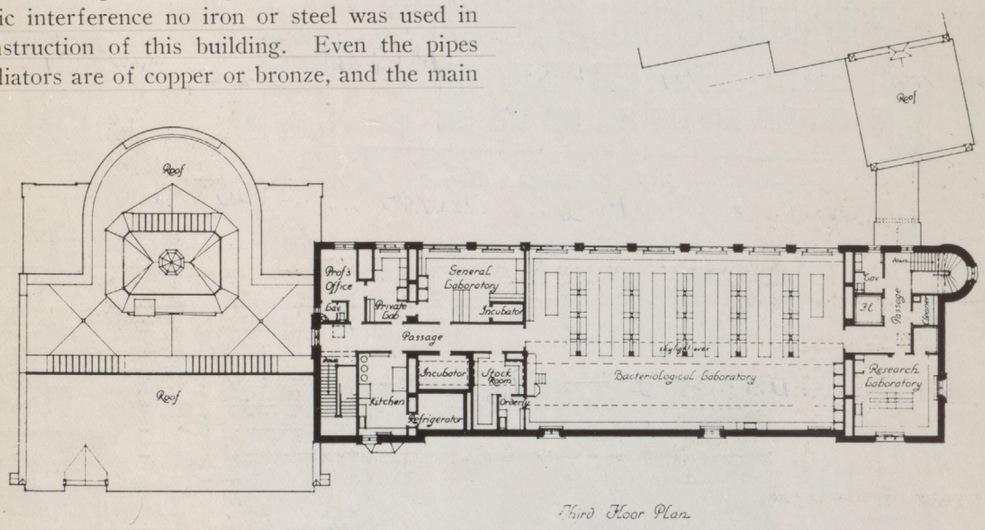
The year 1890 saw also the beginning

of the Thomas Workman building for Mechanical Engineering, the Macdonald Engineering building, and the Macdonald Physics building.

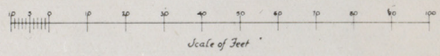
In the donations for the year 1886 is an item of $2,000 given by Mr. W. C. Macdonald, one of the Governors, for fittings and apparatus in the new laboratory. This was the first of those great donations by Sir William Macdonald which were to raise McGill to the status of a first-class scientific school, and which amounted to over twelve million dollars. They include the old and the new Engineering buildings, the Chemistry building, the Physics building, the Agricultural College at St. Anne's, the McGill Union, a tract of land upon the summit of Westmount Mountain, and the Macdonald Park, a tract of land to the north of the campus on which stands the Stadium and which provides space for future extension.

The Physics building, by Messrs. Taylor, Hogle and Davis, follows the type used by the same architects in the Redpath Library. In order to avoid magnetic interference no iron or steel was used in the construction of this building. Even the pipes and radiators are of copper or bronze, and the main construction is of very heavy brick arching with wood beams. I am told by the present Director of the building, Dr. Eve, that the rule against iron has been slightly relaxed of recent years, apparently without bad effects. It was designed for 250 students, engaged mainly in research, and it was here that Sir Ernest Rutherford's investigations into radio-activity were made. At present, owing to the growth of Physics as a subject of general education and to the resulting changes in curriculum, the building is called upon to accommodate some 800 students, mainly elementary. Somewhat the same change has overtaken the Chemistry building. This is a good illustration of the change in ideals of education which has taken place in the last twenty-five or thirty years, and of the extreme difficulty of designing buildings to meet such conditions.

The Chemistry building, by the Architects of the Library and Physics buildings, was commenced in 1896. It is of a more Italian type and seems to

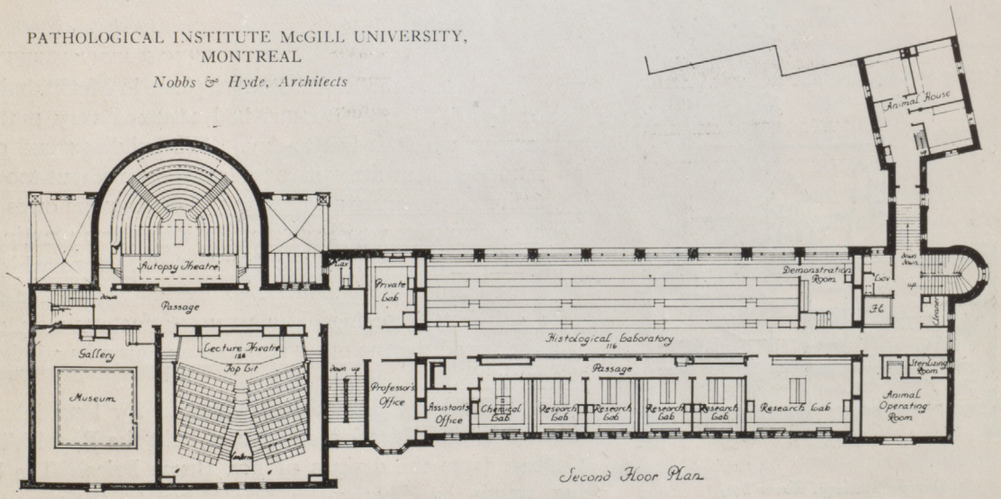


Third Floor Plan.

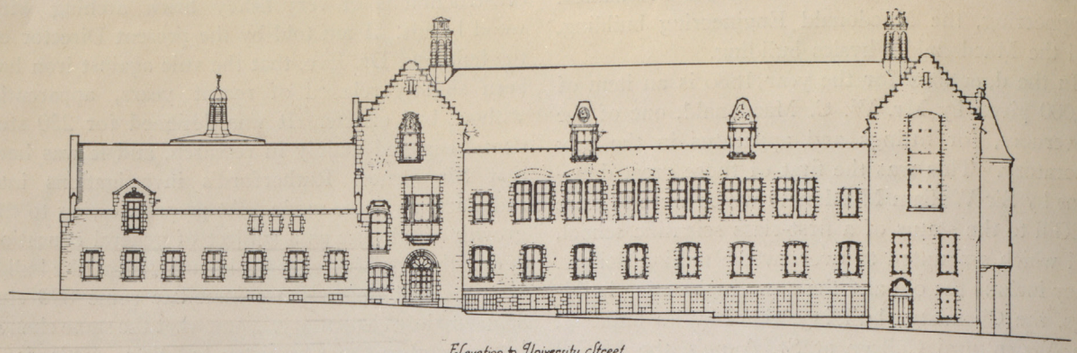


PATHOLOGICAL INSTITUTE McGILL UNIVERSITY, MONTREAL

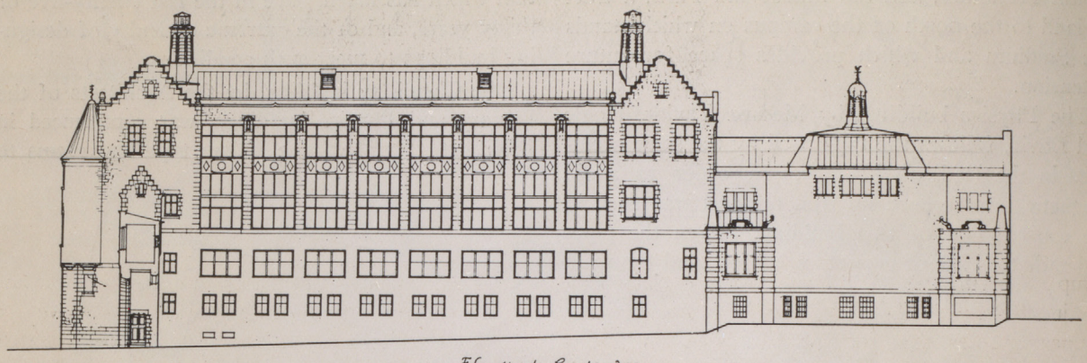
Nobbs & Hyde, Architects



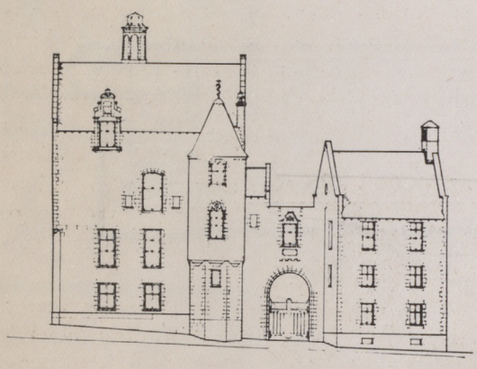
Second Floor Plan.



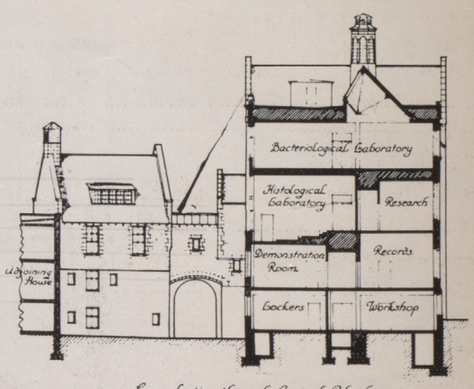
Elevation to University Street



Elevation to Courtyard

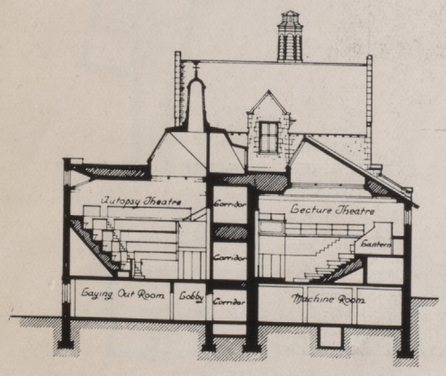


Elevation to Pine Avenue



Cross Section through Central Block

PATHOLOGICAL INSTITUTE, McGILL UNIVERSITY, MONTREAL
Nobbs and Hyde, Architects.

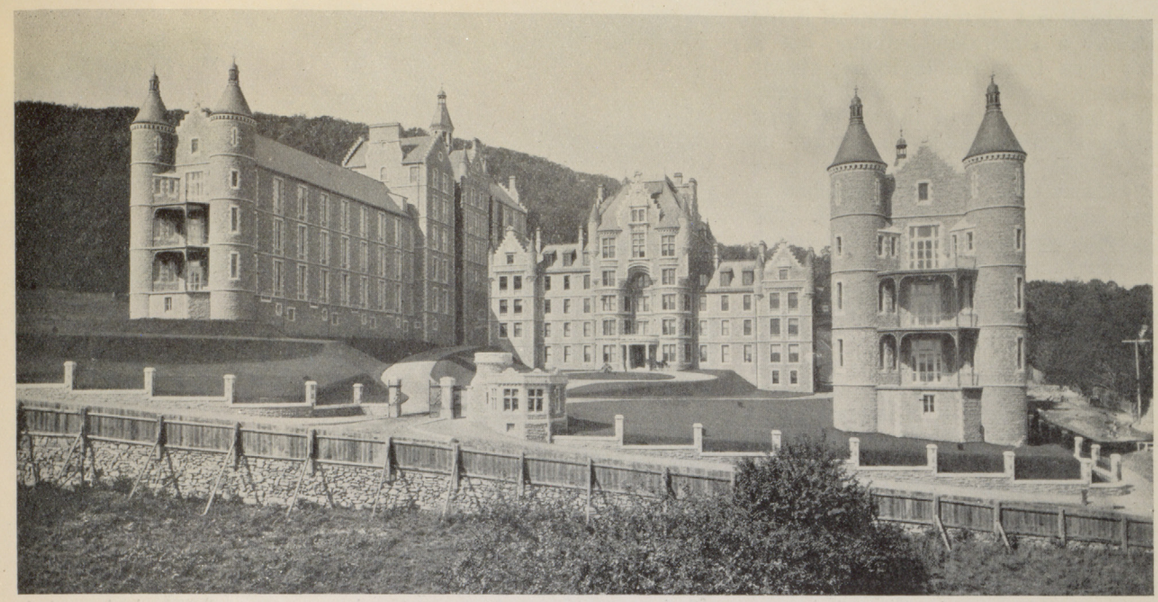


Cross Section through Theatre Wing

mark the close of the Richardsonian phase in McGill building.

So, by 1899, the campus had assumed very much the appearance which it has to-day. The buildings had grown up naturally about the square central space without too much formality or too exact a symmetry. The campus owes much of its beauty to-day to Principal Dawson's tree planting and to the fine grey color of the Montreal limestone which has been used in all the buildings. This has unified the otherwise individual buildings in a very satisfactory way, and it is to be hoped that no other material will ever be admitted to the grounds.

In 1899 Lord Strathcona, who had for long interested himself in the education of women, built the Royal Victoria College, from the designs of Mr. Bruce Price. The building stands on Sherbrooke Street just to the west of the



ROYAL VICTORIA HOSPITAL, MONTREAL, 1887
Saxon Snell, Architect.

campus and provides both residence and classrooms for its students. The design, with its strongly pronounced gables and shallow bay windows, shows clearly the influence of the contemporary English work of Mr. Norman Shaw.

The same architectural influence may be seen in the McGill Union, by Messrs. P. E. Nobbs, Hutchison and Wood, which was given in 1905 by Sir William Macdonald. This building provides very fully for the social activities of the students.

The year 1906 saw the foundation of Macdonald College at St. Anne de Bellevue, some twenty miles south of Montreal at the extremity of the island, for the training of agricultural students and of elementary school teachers. This group of buildings, the largest single gift of Sir William Macdonald, was designed by Messrs. Hutchison, Wood and Miller. The college forms the Agricultural Faculty of the University.

In 1907 McGill suffered the loss by fire of the old Medical building and of the Macdonald Engineering building, with its entire equipment. The latter was at once replaced by the present building from the designs of Mr. P. E. Nobbs. Here we can see, even more distinctly than in the last two buildings mentioned, the influence of Norman Shaw. So from Mr. Price's Royal Victoria College in 1899 the architecture of McGill has shown a very definite trend towards national and English tradition, adapted to Canadian conditions. We may regard this as a return from the American influences, shown in the Library and the Physics building, to the Georgian type of the first buildings.

THE PATHOLOGICAL INSTITUTE, McGILL UNIVERSITY, 1923
Nobbs and Hyde, Architects.

In the same year the new Medical buildings, the gift of Lord Strathcona, were designed by Messrs. Brown and Vallance. They were placed at the uppermost limit of the University grounds so as to be near the Royal Victoria Hospital. Architecturally they are a nearer approach to "Collegiate Gothic" than any other McGill buildings excepting the allied Theological Colleges. The accommodation is for classes of 120 students each for five years, a number which has been considerably exceeded.

The Royal Victoria Hospital is not strictly a University building, but it has been from the beginning closely connected with the Medical Faculty and forms a part of the architectural group constituting the University. It was built from donations by Lord Strathcona and Lord Mountstephen by Mr. Saxon Snell in 1887 to 1893. The building was modelled upon Edinburgh Infirmary and shows in its external appearance the very Scottish sentiment of the Medical Faculty of that time. In 1923 the Pathological building, in a similar type, by Messrs. Nobbs and Hyde, was built upon the adjoining McGill property. It is interesting to compare the variation in treatment of a similar theme between 1887 and 1923. In the same year, and also by Messrs. Nobbs and Hyde, the Osler Memorial Library was fitted up in the Medical building in memory of McGill's most famous medical graduate.

PATHOLOGICAL INSTITUTE, McGILL UNIVERSITY, MONTREAL
Nobbs & Hyde, Architects

The buildings now demanded some unified system of lighting, heating and ventilation, as the instructional power plant of the Engineering building was no longer able to cope with the increasing requirements. The Power building was accordingly erected in 1910 by Mr. P. E. Nobbs on a central site to the rear of the Arts building.

The Stadium in Macdonald Park, in memory of Captain Percival Molson, was opened in 1920. Cut into the hillside overlooking the city and the river, in the manner of a classic Greek stadium, it is possibly the most beautifully placed athletic field in America.

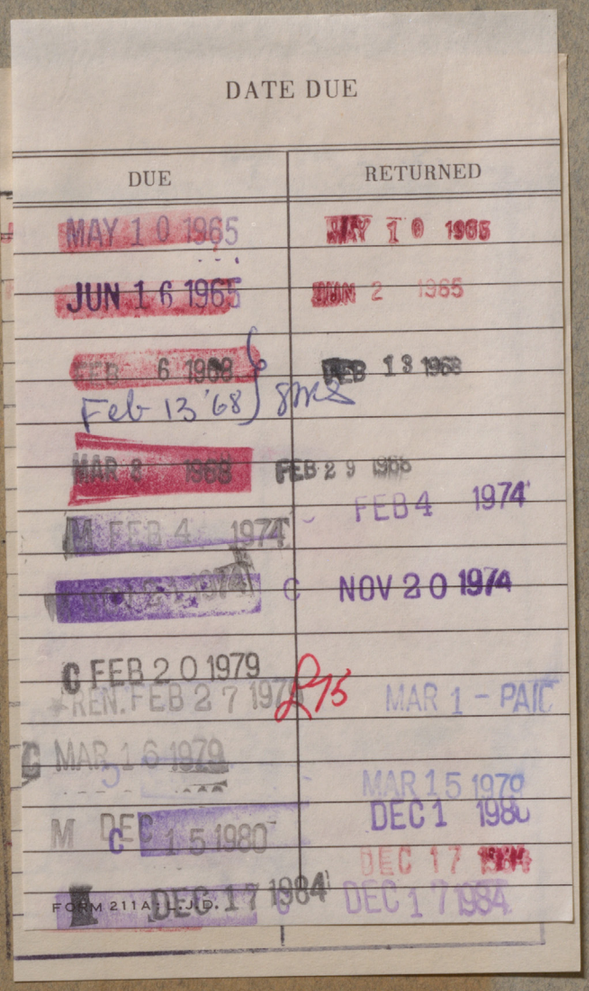
The latest gift, of entrance gates in memory of Sir Thomas Roddick, has just been completed from designs by Mr. Grattan Thompson. It will eventually form part of a Sherbrooke Street front, which a future generation may see completed.

There is still much prospective building. Even if the number of students should not increase in the next few years (and there is much to be said for a policy of limitation), yet McGill needs a Convocation Hall, a Gymnasium and Drill Hall and residences both for students and staff. It is intended very shortly to remodel the Arts building which today, as the result of repeated small alterations, is quite unsuited to its purpose. Care is being taken to preserve the exterior at any rate of the old buildings for, to all McGill men, the Arts building will always be McGill to which all other buildings, however impressive, are additions. We may not forget with what struggles these buildings were begun in 1840—through what troublesome years they passed until with Mr. Molson's first gift in 1860 McGill commenced her onward march.

In front of the Arts building stands an old-fashioned monument crowned by an urn. It is the tomb of the Honourable James McGill, and on the base is the inscription:

"This monument, and the remains which it covers, were removed from the old Protestant Cemetery, Dorchester Street, and placed here in grateful remembrance of the Founder of this University, 23rd June, 1875."

So James McGill lies in the University which he founded a hundred years ago.



DATE DUE

DUE	RETURNED
MAY 10 1965	MAY 10 1965
JUN 16 1965	JUN 2 1965
FEB 6 1968 Feb 13 '68	FEB 13 1968
MAR 8 1968	FEB 29 1968
FEB 4 1974	FEB 4 1974
NOV 20 1974	NOV 20 1974
FEB 20 1979 REN. FEB 27 1979	MAR 1 - PAID
MAR 16 1979	MAR 15 1979
DEC 15 1980	DEC 1 1980
DEC 17 1984	DEC 17 1984

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